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911 SUBJECT MATTER AREAS COUNTERTERRORISM

# State of Bombing Prevention: Partnerships Are Key to Mitigate IED Threat

By **Sean Haglund** September 14, 2021

The aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995. (FBI photo)

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) pose a threat to our nation and the American public, including our critical infrastructure and mass gatherings and crowded places. As past examples have shown us, whether in Oklahoma City 26 years ago or in Nashville just this past year, IEDs remain a pervasive problem for homeland security that requires a whole-of-nation approach to solve.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), through its Office for Bombing Prevention (OBP), leads efforts to implement [National Counter-IED \(C-IED\) policy](#) and enhance our nation's ability to prevent, protect against, respond to, and mitigate the use of explosives against critical infrastructure, the private sector, and federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial entities. This includes leading efforts to implement *Presidential Policy Directive 17 (PPD-17), Countering Improvised Explosive Devices*, which guides our nation's C-IED efforts to secure the U.S. and its allies, partners, and interests. While CISA is part of this whole-of-nation approach, protecting Americans from the threats of IEDs requires close coordination with the public and private sectors.

## Prevailing Threats

We know that a wide range of malicious actors can use easy how-to-instructions found online to build explosive devices out of readily available materials to inflict terror on local communities and both the public and private sectors alike. In fact, in 2020, there were more than 12,000 explosive-related incidents, according to the 2020 United States Bomb Data Center Explosives Incident Report by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF).

# Suspicious or Unattended?

**Criminals or terrorists sometimes conceal improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in backpacks, suitcases, or common items.**  
Use this process to safely determine if an item is a serious threat or just unattended.

## Is it **H O T** ?

Hidden	Obviously suspicious	not Typical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placed out of sight</li> <li>Appears purposely concealed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unexplicable wires or electronics</li> <li>Bomb-like components</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Out of place for the location</li> <li>Potentially related to a threat</li> </ul>

Use R.A.I.N.

**YES**  
(Suspicious)

**NO**  
(Unattended)

- Treat with caution
- Try to determine the owner
- Report to an authority



**If an item is suspicious you should:**



R

**Recognize the Indicators of a Suspected Explosive Device**

Indicators can be related to the characteristics, events, location, or time, including whether the item is Hidden, Obviously suspicious, or not Typical (HOT).



A

**Avoid the Area**

Don't touch the suspected item. Instead, immediately move and direct others to move away immediately.



I

**Isolate the Suspected Item**

Establish a perimeter to secure the area and continue to direct people away. Use frontal and overhead cover and if available wear personal protective equipment.



N

**Notify Appropriate Emergency Services**

Describe the Suspicious items and persons, the person's Actions, the Location of the item, the Time of placement and discovery and Your actions to mitigate risk (SALTY).

## If you **see** something, **say** something®

**REPORT SUSPICIOUS ITEMS**

Contact **local law enforcement** or **9-1-1** in case of emergency






[DEFEND TODAY. SECURE TOMORROW.](#)
If you see something say something only with permission of the appropriate partnership authority.

Posters like this one help people to quickly recognize suspicious items.

CISA OBP and its public and private partners have learned many key lessons as we work together on IED prevention. Among these is the importance of getting “left of boom,” unifying federal efforts, and socializing among as many groups as possible how they, too, can play a role in preventing bombing attacks. Emblematic of this is the joint drive by CISA and the FBI to educate businesses across the nation about how to recognize and report suspicious purchasing activities to prevent bombing attacks. Called “Operation Flashpoint,” the initiative recognizes that approximately 250,000 point-of-sale businesses in the U.S. sell, use, or distribute materials that can be used to build bombs. In a show of federal unity, the two partners from DHS and the Department of Justice are urging retailers and the public to report suspicious activity (such as the purchase of large quantities of certain chemicals) by calling 1-855-TELL-FBI (1-855-835-5324).

A key element to effective bombing prevention has been assertive outreach – the broad-based dissemination of posters, postcards, videos, and other awareness materials (in English and Spanish) so that everyone from retailers and their customers to football game attendees and church-goers knows how to recognize and react to IED-related suspicious activity and incidents. Creating easy-to-remember acronyms for people helps. Since criminals or terrorists sometimes conceal IEDs in backpacks, suitcases, packages and other common items, you can determine if it is dangerous or simply innocuous and unattended by asking yourself if the item is H-O-T. Is it **H**idden, **O**bviously suspicious, and not **T**ypical? (More detailed messaging in the outreach materials helps people further deduce this.)

CISA OBP employs a multi-prong approach to effective bombing prevention that ranges from the identification of suspicious activity and items to planning for and reacting to bomb threats and incidents. CISA offers a vast range of free [trainings](#), tools and products to help local and state authorities, private partners, and many others understand and mitigate the threat of IEDs. This includes educational [What to Do videos](#) so they learn to guard against attacks, respond to suspicious items and behavior, and/or safeguard precursor chemicals to IEDs. The [TRIPwire](#) website gives free, insightful analysis on evolving IED tactics, techniques, and procedures, including best practices on how to prepare for attacks. Our [Multi-Jurisdiction Improvised Explosive Device Security Planning](#) exercises integrate C-IED capability analysis, training, and planning to enhance the IED preparedness and response capabilities of participating jurisdictions. The [Security and Resiliency Guide](#) from CISA OBP and the FBI helps security and operations managers, public safety officials, and others plan and implement C-IED activities. And our [National Counter-IED Capabilities Analysis Database](#) analyzes the capabilities of bomb squads and SWAT teams to ensure those who protect our critical infrastructure have the resources they need to respond to IED threats.

***“A KEY ELEMENT TO EFFECTIVE BOMBING PREVENTION HAS BEEN ASSERTIVE OUTREACH – THE BROAD-BASED DISSEMINATION OF POSTERS, POSTCARDS, VIDEOS, AND OTHER AWARENESS MATERIALS”***

CISA OBP and the FBI lead the Joint Program Office for Countering IEDs as part of a whole-of-government approach to reduce adversaries' access to IED materials, disrupt IED facilitation networks and interdict plots, safeguard people and protect critical infrastructure, and enhance coordination and capacity building. Furthermore, the DHS IED Working Group facilitates intra-departmental coordination to establish a common understanding of roles and responsibilities among DHS components and build a unified and consistent front for the department.

### **The Future**

Future success in preventing bombing attacks will depend upon even deeper public-private partnerships. This includes robust information exchange with our national and international partners, and imparting lessons on one another, like we did this year when we trained Mexican government and United Nations officials on best practices in C-IED. Progress also lies in intensified outreach and cultivating a shared sense of responsibility, so everyone realizes they have a part to play in bombing prevention.

It's important to recognize how far the nation has come in the C-IED space, but also how much more must still be achieved to confront the magnitude of threats today. Many of us are former bomb technicians, police officers, and service members who have witnessed IED attacks up close, seen their devastation, and vowed to do everything we can to prevent them in the future. Together with our partners and the public, we can make the U.S. and the world a safer, more secure place.